

13  
An

Inaugural Dissertation

On

Scrophula,

Submitted to the examination of the  
Trustees & Medical Professors

of the

University of Pennsylvania

For

The Degree

of

Doctor of Medicine

---

By, Stephen Davis

of

Warrenton, North Carolina

---

Philadelphia, April, 1811.

University of London

in  
Medicine

presented to the University of London  
for the degree of Doctor of Medicine

by the  
University of London

the  
University of London

Doctor of Medicine

---

John Smith

London, 1811

---

Printed by J. Smith

1.

# Scrophula, or Kingsevil. —

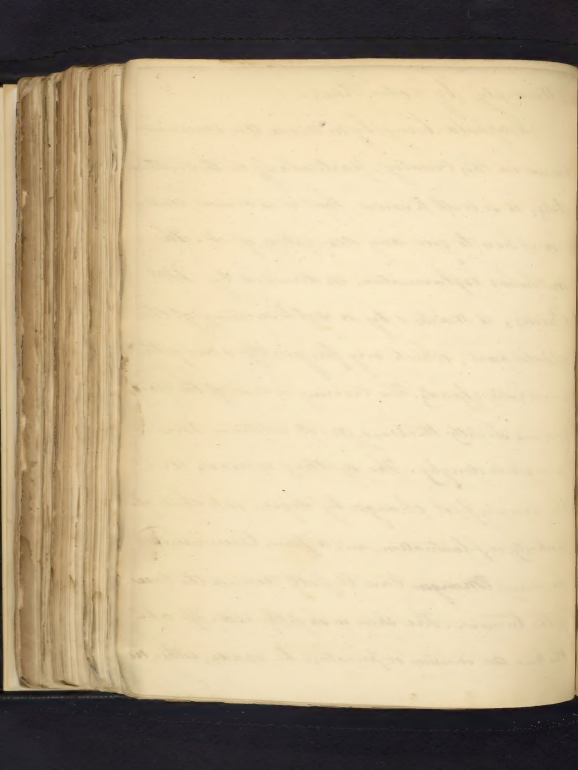
---

The subject which, I have chosen for this essay, although, much canvassed by almost every writer on Medicine & Surgery, has not (in my opinion) been explained on such principles, as will lead to correct or successful practice; And as the Cure of disease has always been justly Considered as the ultimate object of Physic, I shall attempt such a view of the subject, as will tend to more uniform success in the treatment of this distressing Complaint. I shall, in the first place, briefly notice the theories of some of the most modern Writers on this disease, & secondly, attempt to explain its phenomena, on the principles, taught, in

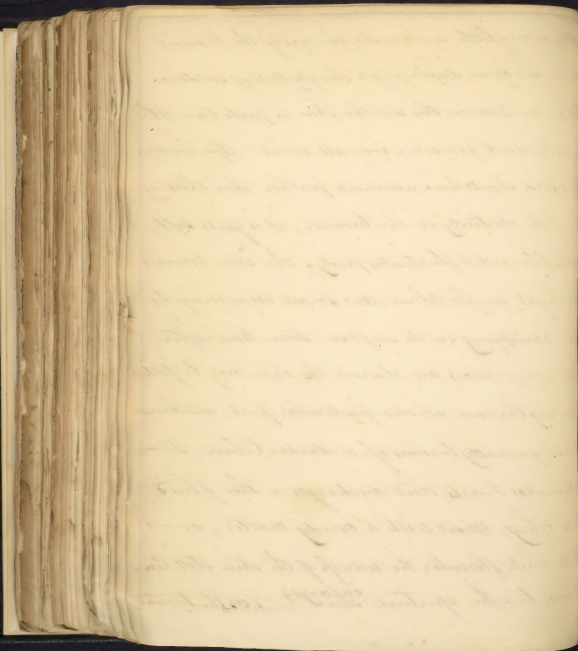


this University, by Doctor Rush.

Scrophula being by no means, an Uncommon disease in this Country, particularly in the Southern States, is so well known, that it is almost Unnecessary here, to give any description of it. The scrophulous inflammation, as described by Mr. Burns, is marked, by a soft swelling of the affected part, which very frequently, is one of the Lymphatic glands. The covering, or coat of the gland, becomes slightly thickened, and its substance more porous and doughy. The swelling increases, and the doughy feel changes, by degrees, into that of elasticity, or fluctuation, and a firm Circumscribed, hardened Margin, can be felt round the base of the tumour. The skin is slightly red. If at this time an incision or puncture be made, either, no



5.  
matter, or very little, is evacuated, the lips of the wound  
inflame and open, displaying a sloughy-looking substance  
within, and between this and the skin, a probe can often  
be introduced for some way all round. If however  
the disease should have advanced further, then there is  
very little elasticity in the tumour, it is quite soft,  
rather flaccid & fluctuates freely; the skin becomes  
of a light purple colour, and small veins may be  
seen ramifying on its surface. Some time after  
these appearances are observed, the skin may be felt  
becoming thinner at one particular part, and here  
it also generally becomes of a darker colour; It  
afterwards bursts, and discharges a thin fluid  
like whey, mixed with a curdy matter, or  
thick white flocculi; the redness of the skin still con-  
tinues, but the aperture <sup>enlarges</sup> ~~will continue~~ as the tumour,



salivaries, thus producing the Serophulous ulcer. The  
 Margins of this kind of sore, are generally smooth,  
 obtuse, and overlap the ulcer, they are of a purple  
 colour, and rather hard & tumid. The surface of the sore  
 is of a light red colour, the granulations are flabby  
 and indistinct, and the aspect is of a peculiar kind, which,  
 says Mr. Burns, Cannot be described. The discharge is  
 then, slightly ropy & copious, with Curdy-looking flakes.  
 The pain is inconsiderable. — When this ulcer has  
 continued for some time, it either begins, slowly to  
 cicatrize, or (as more frequently happens), the discharge  
 diminishes, and becomes thicker, An elevated seat is next  
 formed, of a dirty white, or yellowish colour, this continues  
 on the part a Considerable time, and when it falls  
 off, leaves the place covered with a smooth, purple  
 Cicatrix. — Mr Burns adds, that the preceding Descrip-  
 tion, corresponds to the Mild Serophula. — He



next Remarks that occasionally, especially if a bone be diseased below the ulcer, the sore has a more fiery appearance, the surface is dark coloured, the margins soft, elevated, inflamed & sometimes deformed. The discharge is watery, the pain very considerable, and the surrounding skin inflamed; this has been called the *Scrophula Maligna*. — These are the principal symptoms, when the disease shows itself externally; but as similar affections of the Mesenteric glands uniformly accompany, or precedes the external marks, it is evident that the habit of body must decline. Mr. White says the flesh will become loose and flaccid, the countenance pale, and a general languor & disinclination to exercise of every kind, particularly in the morning will prevail, the appetite will vary, sometimes it will be good, at other times imperfect; an unusual degree of thirst—



Will be experienced, Considerable heat will be excited upon the skin, particularly the palms of the hands; the breath will often be offensive; the Bowels will be affected with an uneasy sensation; and the size of the belly will be increased, principally by wind; the pulse will be quick & small. and the appetite so ~~great~~ much increased, that the patient will be unwilling to change the position in which he is placed. These symptoms Mr. White observes most commonly precede the swelling of the Lymphatic Glands externally. — As these symptoms sufficiently characterize the disease, it is unnecessary to add more.

Scrophula, generally shows itself during infancy, between the age of three & seven years, tho' this is by no means uniformly the case; Mr. White has seen it from the age of four days to sixty years & upwards.



I have seen it from twelve to thirty years, and  
my friend Mr. Murray, informs me he has seen  
it in a man of fifty in Virginia. It  
prevails mostly in Marshy Countries and Middle  
latitudes, hence the reason of its more frequent  
appearance in the Southern states. Persons who  
have fineness, delicate Complexions, grey or blue  
eyes & light hair, are said to be most subject  
to this disease, but that this is not the case has  
been proved by the observations of Mr. White, Mr.  
Carmichael and many others; also from the fact  
that in the Southern states, few negroes are affected  
with it, to one white person; this is also the case  
in Philadelphia, as I am informed by Mr. Elmer  
of the Philadelphia Dispensary, this fact clearly proving  
the influence of Cleanliness, diet, &c. &c. in producing  
the disease. It is not Communicable from one



Person to another. Different Animals are subject to it, as Dogs, Horses & Sheep. —

~~most~~ <sup>most</sup> writers on Syphilis. Consider it as differing from the generality of Diseases, by the Circumstances of hereditary transmission, viz they conceive it to depend on a certain habit of body tainted with some peculiar disease derived from one or both Parents; the common opinion is, that this Acromony or virus, resides in the blood, and though sometimes apparently extinguished, yet actually exists during life, and that its unhappy consequences are transmitted from generation to generation: several more modern writers have gone great lengths to disprove this absurd opinion, but in doing so, they have fallen into the opposite extreme. It is certainly as much a hereditary disease as any other, viz it is so, as far as predisposition, by which is meant a



7  
preternatural aptitude to disease in any particular  
part of the body, founded on debility either native  
or acquired) Can descend more or less completely  
from parent to child. - thus when two persons of  
a delicate form of body have children, it is  
natural to expect a similar delicacy in their  
offspring, but it does not follow of course that  
this will be the case, there is only a predisposition  
given, which may be overcome by proper treatment.

In like manner, if one parent or both be  
scrophulous, the child will very probably be  
so, but this is no proof of any existing poison  
or virus; there is a susceptibility or predisposition,  
which may, or may not, be converted into disease  
according to the force of the remote & exciting causes  
applied. It is a fact fully ascertained.



However, by most writers on Scrophulous, as well as  
by my own observations, that it runs very  
much in certain families; but at the same  
time, it is equally well known that the Children  
of Scrophulous parents, often continue as long as  
they live, entirely free from the disease; and  
that one child is sometimes afflicted, while  
its Father, Mother, Brothers, Sisters, and all  
the rest of its relations, have never had  
any symptoms of the disease;—all these  
facts are to be accounted for, only, by a  
knowledge of the pre-dispositions, and the various  
Combinations and Changes they are Capable of  
undergoing. — Authors have  
differed much in opinion, with respect to what  
they call, the proximate Cause of this  
disease. Galen & his followers, thought



11.  
it arose from a cold pituitous matter, producing  
tumefaction by stagnating in the glands. Others,  
imagining a determinate quantity of solids, and  
fluids to be necessary to the formation of the  
human body, and its preservation in health, have  
ascribed this, and a variety of other diseases to a  
redundant quantity of the fluids. Avicenna  
supposed it arose from melancholy. Wiseman  
maintained that the proximate cause depended  
on a prevailing acidity in the serous part  
of the blood. Doctor Cullen, convinced, that  
a simple redundancy of any particular humour  
could not produce scrophula, had recourse  
to the supposition of a peculiar Acrimony of  
the fluids. W. B. Bell, says that whatever  
may be the exciting or predisposing Causes of  
scrophula, the disease itself either depends



12.  
upon, or is intimately Connected with a debility of  
the Constitution in general, and probably of the  
lymphatic system in particular. He says that  
he is induced to believe this, from the remedies  
which have been found most serviceable in the  
Cure, being all of a tonic, invigorating nature.

It would be tedious and useless to expa-  
tiate on the many absurd notions which have  
been entertained by various other writers: I  
shall only mention those of Mr. White, and  
Mr. Carmichael, each of whom has taken  
considerable pains to enforce their opinions.

The former, supposes it to arise immediately  
from obstructions in the lymphatic system, most  
frequently occasioned by a visciditv of lymph,  
or that fluid contained in the lymphatic system.

The latter, has written a treatise dated Feb. 1782.



professedly, to prove the proximate Cause to be  
Disorder of the digestive organs, producing Acidous  
fermentation in the primae viae; but in what  
Manner this Can excite the phenomena of  
Scrophula, he says himself, would lead to idle  
Speculations to Conjecture. He says, that the  
advantages derived from alkaline Medicines,  
and Animal food in Scrophula, satisfy the opinion  
that it arises from an excess of Acid in the body.

These, without adding any more, may be  
sufficient to shew the Contrariety of Opinions  
that have been entertained on this subject;—  
that none of them, are founded on Reason, or  
Correct principle, is evinced, by the inefficacy  
of the numerous & widely different Medicines  
which they have recommended, for uniform Success  
in the treatment of the disease. —



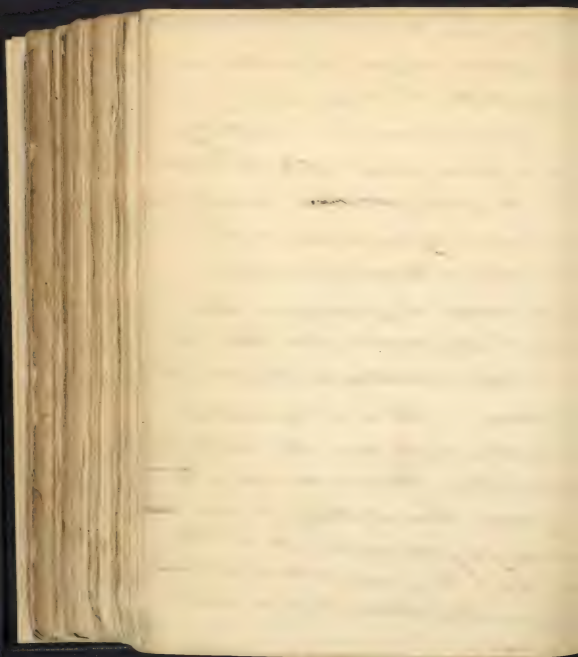
I believe, with Doctor Rush, that Scrophula is a misplaced state of fever; that it is originally an arterial disease, thrown on the Lymphatic system, from predisposing debility in those parts; and that this debility is either native or acquired. —

That it is a misplaced state of Fever, I infer, 1<sup>st</sup> from its remote and exciting causes, which are, Marsh & Human Miasmata; Certain Aliments which act by their quantity or quality; too much or too little food; food of unwholesome qualities; improper dress; Worms; Costiveness, suppression of perspiration; sedentary life; undue exercise of the understanding; different passions of the mind; heat & cold succeeding each other &c. — 2<sup>nd</sup> I infer it, from its first symptoms; which are dry skin; red and clean, or furred tongue; swelled, black,



and spongy Gums; Corded & tense, or feeble and frequent pulse; and from its sometimes sudden producing death. 3<sup>rd</sup> I infer its being originally a febrile disease, from its affecting all ages, colours, sexes & habits. 4<sup>th</sup> I infer it from its affecting ~~all~~ <sup>the</sup> animals, birds, Man, particularly Hogs, Horses and Sheep. It is an endemic at Barbadoes and is called a glandular disease<sup>†</sup>. It affects different glands, sometimes the testes, Muscular glands, Liver, eyes, bladder, ovaria & intestines, sometimes even the teeth & bones. - The above Circumstances taken together so fully prove the identity of Scrophula and Fever, that it is unnecessary to Cite any more. There is certainly no more reason for attaching any specific character to this disease, than to those forms of Morbid excitement called Gout & Rheumatism, which are now

<sup>†</sup> Rush.



generally acknowledged to depend on morbid or irregular action of the blood vessels. —

### Cure.

From the variety of opinions entertained, respecting the proximate Cause of this disease, we would naturally expect great diversity of practices; Accordingly we find that there is scarcely a Medicine, which has not been reputed as useful; the whole Malaria Medica, both ancient and modern has been ransacked for a specific; and in no disease do Physicians differ more about the Cure than in this. Doctor Cullen recommends Mineral Waters, & the Bark which however he had not much Confidence in. He says that in several instances the Venues of Callosfoot appeared to him to be successful; He speaks severely against the use of Antimony and Mercury. — Mr Burns says that the peruvian Bark is often ineffectual, because



Improperly administered: that in order to obtain the  
benefits of the specific Action of the Bark, it  
should be given in large quantities, and continued  
for several Weeks, with a good diet, Air and  
protection in case Mr White says the general Cause  
of *Leishmania* being is that it is a disease of debility,  
and therefore the great object is to invigorate the habit  
by every possible Means, the kind of which are  
Tonic Medicines and sea bathing; some are of Opinion  
that, in the Case of young Patients this should be  
continued, during the summer Months every Year  
to the age of fourteen or fifteen; Many recommend  
it not only during the summer, but throughout  
the year; whilst others are for administering  
alteratives, principally the alkaline salts, with or  
without Antimonials and the different Tonics during  
the Winter, and the sea water, or sea bathing  
or Cold bathing during the summer for a



Continued a two or three years from the Commencement of the disease, with this general observation that they will outgrow the Complaints. —  
 As to Regimen, some recommend a mild and Vegetable diet, others recommend Animal food and fermented liquors. — Various other modes of practice might be mentioned, some condemn Mercury, and praise the Bark; some condemn Bark and speak in the highest terms of Calomel & Subcarbonate of lime, &c. &c. — They are, as Doctor Rush observes, all wrong, and they are all right! —  
 For they have done good or harm, according to the state of the system, when they were given.

It is strange that attention to the state of the system, as indicated by the pulse, has hitherto been altogether neglected by writers on this disease, a circumstance which can only be attributed to the influence of the popular opinion, that



it depends on a peculiar action of the fluids  
transmitted from parent to child, and therefore  
attention to the general state of the system would  
be superfluous in a disease which could only  
be combated by such means, as would be capable  
of subverting its supposed origin; or in other words  
by those remedies which from their unknown  
mode of operation have been denominated sp. spec.

But if the theory which I have given  
be correct, our only hope for uniform success, is to  
keep a steady eye on the pulse, and to treat the  
disease, as we would treat Consumption, or ~~other~~ <sup>any</sup>  
other form of Fever, by changing our Medicines  
with the varying forms of disease; for certainly a  
Rapid pulse requires the same mode of treatment,  
whether it occur in Fever, Typhus, Consumption or  
Erysipelas; - In no disease, is a change of medicines  
more often necessary than in this; because the system



so often changes. —

The Remedies for Scorbutus may be divided  
 1<sup>st</sup> into such as are proper in its state of gravity, and  
 2<sup>nd</sup> into such as are proper in its state of Weak Morbid  
Action. To the first general head, belong 3<sup>rd</sup> Blood  
Cutting; If the pulse be full or tense this will be  
 necessary; not only at the Commencement of the disease,  
 but after it has continued for any length of time;  
 Were this robust Remedy more often used in the  
 disease of Childhood, we should have fewer Melanchol-  
 ic, broods of Miserable old age. — 2<sup>nd</sup> Cathartics.  
 These should be frequently repeated; they act not only  
 by discharging Acrid Juices & Bile, but by inducing  
 Morbid excitement to the Vessels, also by lessening  
 the quantity of blood. Many Cases might be mention'd  
 where this Remedy alone has performed the Cure. The  
 best purgatives for children are Calomel & Rhubarb, or  
 Calomel & the root of the May apple. 3<sup>rd</sup> Emetics, may



be useful, by discharging acrid matters from the  
Stomach; and by lessening the action of the Blood-  
vessels. 4<sup>th</sup> Lix. thoracics, are highly recommended  
in this disease, they act by keeping up the moisture  
of the skin and by equalizing excitement. 5<sup>th</sup> Blis-  
ters or Issues; that these may prove highly beneficial,  
may be presumed, from a fact, mentioned by Doctor  
Deveraux. J. Claiborne, in his *Imperial Dissertation*  
On the use of Artificial Drains, in the Case of diseases;  
A Negro Boy aged 13. Who has long had running  
Scrophulous ulcers on his neck, which it appeared  
impossible to Cure, accidentally received a Burn, on  
the abdomen, just below the Umbilicus, which  
was succeeded by a profuse discharge of pus; during  
this time, the ulcers on the neck readily cicatrized,  
but recurred, so soon as the Burn was healed; He  
asks might not a drain established on a convenient  
part, act efficaciously, by suspending or



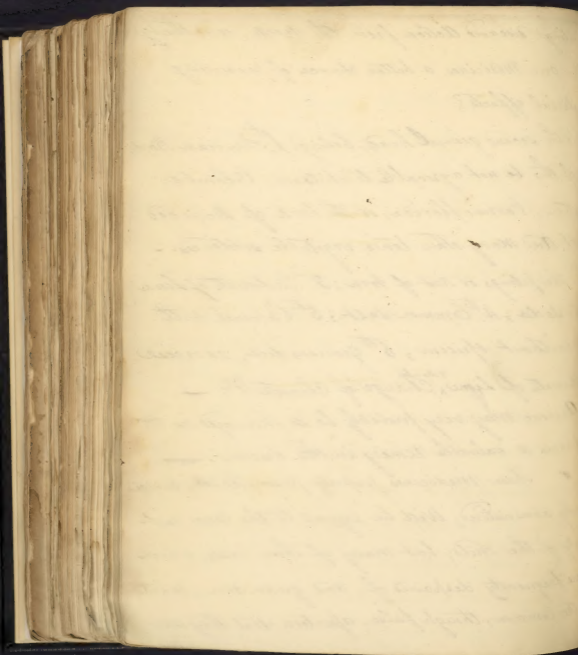
diverting diseased action from the neck, and thereby  
allow our Medicines, a better chance of producing  
beneficial effects?

To the second general head, belong 1<sup>st</sup> Peruvian Bark,  
or if this be not agreeable to children, Colombo,  
Gentian, Cornus florida, or the bark of Dogwood  
root, And many other tonic vegetable substances. -

2<sup>nd</sup> The filings or rust of iron; 3<sup>rd</sup> Carbonate of Lime  
and Soda; 4<sup>th</sup> Common salt; 5<sup>th</sup> Calomel with  
or without opium; 6<sup>th</sup> generous diet, exercise,  
Muriate of Lime, <sup>or Barley</sup> Change of Climate &c. -

Arsenic may very probably be so managed as to  
prove a valuable remedy in this disease. -

These Medicines properly prescribed and judiciously  
administered, Will be equal to the Cure, not  
only of the mild, but many of those cases, which  
are frequently despaired of, and given over, with  
the Common, though false, assertion that they are



incurable". It would be useless, and lead me beyond<sup>20</sup>  
the limits assigned to this essay, to notice the numerous  
external applications that have been recommended in  
different stages of Jorgphulous ulcers. It may be sufficient  
to observe that all stimulating and irritating applications,  
should be avoided; and that, the dressings should be  
of the mildest kind, unless the tumor shall have  
become indolent. —

I must now offer my sincere thanks, to  
the Professors; not only for the benefit derived,  
from their several lectures; but for other  
Favours received. —

